

■GLOBAL

HEALTH - Efforts to treat and prevent pneumonia are falling short in the 15 countries responsible for three-quarters of the world's annual deaths from the disease, according to a "report card" issued by the US-based International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC). Pneumonia kills more children under five every year – 1.6 million – than measles, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The report's lead author and IVAC's executive director, Orin Levine, said unimplemented policies were at fault. "We have safe effective proven interventions that can decrease under-five deaths by two-thirds, but they are simply not reaching the children who need them the most."

HUMAN RIGHTS - It takes little to bring out the scars that many women who were raped in Bosnia still carry. Rumours, later shown to be unfounded, that Angelina Jolie would star in a film to be shot in Sarajevo on the war-time love between a Serb man and a Bosniak Muslim girl he raped, had women's groups lodging strong protests. The false reports spotlighted the fate of thousands of Bosniak Muslim women believed to have been raped by Serbs mostly in eastern Bosnia in the 1992-95 war. Many were repeatedly violated for months. Several were killed. Many children they gave birth to were adopted or sent to orphanages. Hundreds of women terminated pregnancies, even late ones, in hospitals or health care centres after fleeing eastern Bosnia, according to aid organisations such as Women Victims of War and the United Nations Children's Fund. Serbs deny that rapes occurred by their forces in eastern Bosnia.

DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMY - G20 Summit - Currency and trade tensions may have grabbed the headlines from the two-day summit of the Group of 20 advanced and developed economies, but the bigger story is how the tables have turned and given developing countries a much stronger voice at the international negotiating table. This power shift is reflected in the communiqué issued at the G-20 summit that ended on Nov. 12, showing that members agreed to set indicative agendas and steps to prevent competitive and destructive currency devaluations rather than fixed targets, which typically put a lot of pressure on developing countries. A call by the United States to set a cap on trade surpluses, which was unpopular particularly with China that has a surplus of 27.1 billion U.S. dollars, was not adopted by the G-20. Instead, G-20 leaders said in a communiqué after their Nov. 11-12 summit that they would come up with "indicative guidelines composed of a range of indicators" that would facilitate "timely identification of large (economic) imbalances that require preventive and corrective actions to be taken".

ENVIRONMENT - An international agreement reached in the Japanese city of Nagoya constitutes a great step forward towards protecting biodiversity from decimation, but also represents an enormous legislative and administrative task, environment experts say. The Nagoya protocol, signed in late October by the 193 member states of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, includes more than 40 measures aimed at fighting bio-piracy and preventing misappropriation of genetic resources. The agreement outlines a strategic plan for implementation of the measures to halt the loss of biodiversity within the next 10 years, and foresees benefits for developing countries from sustainable industrial and commercial use of biogenetic resources.

■AFRICA

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC - A rise in armed incursions is restricting people's movements, reducing their ability to farm and increasing food security concerns in the Haut-Mbomou and Mbomou regions in the southeast Central African Republic (CAR), says an international humanitarian agency.

R. CONGO - An emergency vaccination campaign against polio begins Nov. 12 in the Republic of Congo, where an epidemic centred on the southern city of Pointe-Noire has killed at least 100 people since the beginning of October. According to Congolese health authorities, the epidemic has killed 97 people in Pointe-Noire, the economic capital of the country, two people in Dolisie and one in Nkayi, in the southwest. A World Health Organization update released on Nov. 9 reported 184 cases of acute paralysis and 85 deaths, noting that the majority of cases have occurred in the population aged 15 and older. Polio usually affects children under the age of five.

DJIBOUTI - A "forgotten emergency" has left tens of thousands of pastoralists in Djibouti needing food and nutrition assistance as well as longer-term coping mechanisms, according to the UN.

KENYA / UGANDA - Heavy rains have ruined crops in parts of northern Uganda, adding to the many challenges already faced by a region striving to recover from years of conflict that resulted in millions confined to "protected villages".

SOUTH AFRICA - About 29 percent of South African pregnant women were living with HIV in 2009 - a figure that has barely shifted over the past four years, despite increased levels of commitment from the country's health department and numerous prevention campaigns.

ZIMBABWE - When light rain fell for two consecutive days in late October 2010, a farmer in a village about 70km northwest of Harare thought the main farming season had begun.

■ASIA

ASIA REGION - Millions more people across Asia will become food insecure due to increased water scarcities, reinforcing the need for greater efficiency in both irrigated and rain-fed rice production.

AFGHANISTAN - The recent ban on around 150 NGOs - almost all of them local NGOs - for flouting reporting procedures is believed to be an Afghan government attempt to demonstrate it is taking action against corruption, aid workers say.

LAOS - In the world's most heavily bombed country per capita, a specific Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has been adopted to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO) and help survivors 37 years after the last US bomb fell on Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos).

TIMOR - In a small city where most of the 22,000 inhabitants rely on subsistence farming to put food on the table, one young woman has gone against the grain with a business venture that embodies the changing times in Timor-Leste, South-east Asia's newest and poorest nation.

■LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

ARGENTINA - The BP oil spill earlier this year in the Gulf of Mexico seems to have motivated Argentina to double the protected area in the Patagonian Sea, which is rich in petroleum -- and in biodiversity. "What the Gulf of Mexico spill (which began in April) showed us is that even the most modern corporations can take months to seal off a leak, and for us, that would be fatal," said biologist Santiago Krapovickas, coordinator of the Forum for the Conservation of the Patagonian Sea. The Patagonian Sea, part of the South Atlantic Ocean, is home to a great variety of mammal and bird species, as well as shellfish and commercially valuable fish species.

CARIBBEAN REGION - Caribbean ministers of agriculture, journalists, farmers and academics gathered in this tiny but picturesque south Caribbean island in a rearguard bid to refocus a region used to existing mostly for tourism on agriculture, given a mounting food import bill and fears of yet another global food crisis. Few who attended the plethora of workshops, ministerial meetings and networking opportunities at the Caribbean Week of Agriculture expressed any doubts about the urgency of sounding alarms for a sector that has been treated as a distant cousin by governments, even though the dollar contribution of agriculture is as valuable as tourism in many countries.

WFWO's Communication Team